



## The Graduate Review

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Volume 1

Article 15


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2016

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### Recommended Citation

Urban, Timothy Francis (2016) A Tightrope over an Abyss: Humanity and the Lords of Life. *The Graduate Review*, 1, 66-75.  
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# A Tightrope over an Abyss: Humanity and the Lords of Life

TIMOTHY FRANCIS URBAN

The similarities between Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche are striking in that both emphasize philosophy as an active process that is the never ending and creative task of the individual subject. As such, they viewed the world as being written through an individual's subjectivity. Their affirmation of the individual as a creator of self and world establishes them within the same philosophical scope. Both thinkers were ahead of their time in their ability to recognize and deconstruct past philosophical assumptions in order to move forward and create a philosophy for the future.

To create their own philosophies for the future, Emerson and Nietzsche needed to look to the past to destroy previous assumptions so they could erect their own individual modes of thought. To do this, they needed to deconstruct old philosophies through language. This undertaking required recognition on their parts that language is never fixed, never static, and always open to interpretation. In short, language is not simply reduced to binary opposites, for in between these binaries, there are degrees of definition. These degrees of difference depend on the individual's perspective. Through individual interpretations, language is always ambiguous and can be molded in a way to mirror the perspective of the individual who is engaged in a reciprocal relationship with language. The individual creates the very language that defines him or her, making identity a creation of language.

Emerson and Nietzsche conceived of the inherent gap

between language and the world of objects, but instead of this recognition leading to a pessimistic and nihilistic worldview, one void of meaning, both thinkers placed the individual in the center, making him/her the creator of meaning. Emerson acknowledges the world as we know it is a creation. He writes, "Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast" (209). Since Nature and literature are only possible through language, they are by default subjective phenomena. Nature and literature are subjective phenomena because both require a subject to do the naming, and hence "every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast" is meant to convey how we use language, which can only ever be metaphorical in describing objects of the world, to create a human interpretation of Nature. Our ability to name and create implies we can never know the Truth, which is absolute, but only truths, which are subjective, and how we can never know the thing-in-itself, but only the world of our own subjectivity.

For both thinkers, the aforementioned gap between language and the thing-in-itself allows for ambiguity, which necessitates interpretation for any meaning to be had. Ambiguity leads to reinterpretations that inevitably refer to a process always in the act of creating. By singling out the word "process," it becomes important to note that by this both thinkers recognize the hermeneutical process as never ending. It is my contention that both philosophers reconcile the gap between language and the thing-in-itself through their representations of the subject engaged in the hermeneutical process.

This paper looks at how both thinkers look to the individual as the bridge between language and the thing-in-itself (the latter is a Kantian term used to designate the noumena, which is the "mind-independent-world, and can be defined as an object's essence). I look at how Emerson conceives of the poet as sayer and a creator of meaning. In relation to this, Emerson's essay, "Experience," develops the notion of the poet as creator by examining how reality is created by individuals. Emerson, in the face of having his own world shattered after his son Waldo's death, is forced to build his world back up, creating a new foundation by engaging with his hermeneutical consciousness. Emerson is only able to establish meaning through

interpretation. The hermeneutical process is ever-transforming and dependent upon the existence of a subject who engages and practices it (Makarushka 85). To highlight how the hermeneutical process works through language, I will depend on Nietzsche's essay "On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense," which as an early Nietzschean text is highly indebted to Emerson.

For the hermeneutical consciousness to take hold of an individual, there needs to be the recognition that all we encounter is interpreted through our own unique subjective lens. And the only way interpretation is ever possible is through language, something we take as a given, and thus for granted, yet without it, no meaning is possible. As the eminent Emerson critic of today, Stanley Cavell has written quite a bit about Emerson's use and views of language. Cavell asserts that Emerson's use of language in "Experience" is a way for Emerson to re-inhabit the ordinary (Unapproachable 82). To re-inhabit the ordinary requires Emerson to reject the Kantian noumenal realm, or the thing-in-itself, which is always unknowable and outside of language and subjective experience, so he can undergo the necessity of "synthesis" (Unapproachable 86). By synthesis, Cavell claims Emerson puts his experiences together into a unified whole through his encounter with a world of objects. In other words, Emerson embraces the phenomenal world created by language so he can re-inhabit the ordinary world of objects.

On one level I agree with Cavell, since Emerson seeks out and advocates that the subject embrace a middle way in "Experience." Nonetheless to say all Emerson does here in the essay is accept how language defines the ordinary is to miss the point. For Emerson, language both writes us while we write it, thus giving us presence within the world. The structure of language is circular, and within the pre-existing structure there is room for the subject to create new meaning. I take Cavell's assertion that Emerson re-inhabits the ordinary as limiting, whereas Emerson's actual engagement with the hermeneutical process is liberating.

Concerning the limits of language in "Experience," critic Gayle Smith correctly recognizes how Emerson is preoccupied by the inherent gap between language and its relation to the world,

writing, "The problem of reconciling language and reality seems particularly urgent in "Experience," where Emerson decries the way subtle forces, including language itself, predetermine our perceptions, robbing us of genuine contact with reality" (85). Language does rob us of contact with genuine reality, if by genuine reality Smith means it prevents us from knowing a thing's essence. The Emerson of the first half of "Experience" would agree with her. Smith's argument fails to touch upon how Emerson is optimistic about language and the subjective use of it by the end of the piece.

The Emerson of the second half of "Experience" does not despair of the depravity of language. He sees an opportunity. It is this very depravity that allows the subject to take a stance, as a bridge, connecting in his/her own way the gap between language and reality. With this recognition we encounter the Emerson who utters, "why not realize your world?" (212). However, the creation of a new world is only possible for Emerson once the old world has been destroyed. This is why we need to encounter the disillusioned Emerson of the first part of "Experience," otherwise the affirmative Emerson of the latter half would not be able to reconstruct his world. There would be nothing to reconstruct if the old edifice still stands in the way.

The old edifice is Kant's transcendentalism, which distinguishes between two worlds: the *a priori* world of phenomenal existence, or the world we see empirically every day, and the noumenal realm, or the world of essences or ideas. In short, Emerson ignores Kant's noumenal realm to focus on the only realm he can ever know in his own way: the phenomenal realm.

Nietzsche, in his essay, "On Truth," takes Emerson's stance and interrogates the gap between language and the world-in-itself. He recognizes this gap but takes Emerson's argument a step further by calling the Truth of this gap an illusion (whereas Emerson just states it is unknowable). Nietzsche recognizes that language is a metaphor for the world, and as such, the concept of a tree is an illusion that has little or nothing whatsoever to do with the object-in-itself. Nietzsche writes,

*We separate things according to gender, designating the tree as masculine and the plant as feminine. What arbitrary assignment! How*

*far this oversteps the canons of certainty! We talk of a "snake": this designation touches only upon its ability to twist itself and could therefore also fit a worm. What arbitrary differentiations! (116)*

The arbitrariness of language leads Nietzsche to assert the thing-in-itself is always incomprehensible, so why ever strive for it. No one who is a user of language can ever achieve or grasp hold of the thing-in-itself. Stanley Cavell, acknowledging this in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, writes about philosophers who try to clutch versus philosophers who are merely attracted to things (86). The former tries to synthesize language and reality but fails in reconciling the two. The latter recognizes, like Nietzsche, the impossible task of reconciliation and instead, due to his/her attraction to objects, undergoes the process of creating his/her own world.

Many critics have previously cited the relationship between the two thinkers, with most noting a similarity between concepts, ideas, and philosophy as a way of life, thus in opposition to metaphysical musings and the past as guide. In her extensive study entitled *Religious Imagination and Language in Emerson and Nietzsche*, Irena S.M. Makarushka argues the religious imagination and language of the two thinkers "are both the condition and the expression of individual freedom" (104). She does this by focusing on how each thinker uses language to construct, and, therefore, create his own image of the world, connecting this task to religion in the sense that the religious is meant to establish the meaning of the self and the world.

Makarushka identifies each thinker's task as being a direct response to the nihilism of the prominent organized religions of their day, defining doctrine as being fixed and thus impenetrable. It is this stasis of religious meaning, she argues, that compels each thinker to turn to the original point of religion, which is "religion as an active process engaged in reinterpreting the world" (4). Therefore, though Nietzsche is arguably an atheist, and Emerson denies the Christian version of God, both thinkers use language to destroy past dogmas and beliefs to reinterpret the world through their own subjectivity.

Critics have been drawn to both thinkers because they share such an affinity for the way they view the subject encountering the

world. In "Experience," Emerson begins with the question "Where do we find ourselves?" and he responds with a declaration meant to show him tottering between knowing and ignorance. His answer: "In a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe it has none" (198).

Sharon Cameron, in her essay "Representing Grief" has aptly argued that this sense of being lost in the world, uncertain of one's ability to know, is the direct result of the death of Emerson's child. She takes this further and argues that for the remainder of the essay, the dead child is present even where he is absent, and thus she makes the entire essay center on the death of Waldo. Although the death of the child is the catalyst that begins the essay, it is not what holds it together. What holds the essay together is Emerson's own subjective self because, as Ryan White notes, the essay shows Emerson's transition "from a representational mode of philosophy to a semiotic one" (288). In "Experience," Emerson is no longer concerned with showing how language represents or mirrors what he calls the Lords of Life – Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness – but rather he has shifted to examine how human subjects use language. With the human subject as center, Emerson later asserts we are all we can know, writing, "Hermes, Cadmus, Columbus, Newton, Bonaparte are the mind's ministers" (211) to emphasize how reality has been created by human minds.

Emerson reveals how language is always in the process, and never finished, of unveiling reality to the subjective self. As Nietzsche asserts in his essay "On Truth," the world of reality is a human world resulting from the human intellect. Through language it is the only world we can know.

Cavell uses the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, specifically his *Philosophical Investigations*, to describe what Emerson is trying to accomplish in "Experience." Cavell writes,

*In the Investigations...the demand for unity in our judgments, that is, our deployment of concepts, is not the expression of the conditionedness or limitations on our humanness but of the human effort to escape our humanness...Wittgenstein has discovered the systematic in the absence of unity. (87-88)*

In other words, unity, as a concept, is impossible, since experience as a continual process prevents completeness, and thus unity, from every truly occurring. To overcome this, Wittgenstein establishes that philosophical systems are a means of compensating for this absence of unity in an undefined world. By defining the world, categorizing it, humanity creates order from chaos. Subjectivity allows us to create through language, erecting ourselves as divine beings, part and particle of the whole, which escapes language and thus definition. We deploy concepts to escape our humanness, for these are the inventions that separate us from the other beings inhabiting the earth. Our ability to create systems is our only means of affirming our own certainties in the face of an always uncertain world. As Emerson writes,

*We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediate, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors. Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects. (209)*

For Emerson, the only certainty we can have is a faith in our own existence, an existence that allows us to will our worlds into creation, hence the subject-lenses and their creative power. We mediate between the self and world and interpret it to synthesize the “Not-I” with the “I” who experiences the world as objects. When Emerson writes about perhaps there being no objects, he is saying that indeed our subjective views may be wrong, but nonetheless they are all we have to work with. He writes, “We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them. It depends on the mood of the man, whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem” (200). We encounter, we interpret, and our views encounter the interpretations of others, so that we sometimes reinterpret, all of which leads us to the creative will, which is further developed by Nietzsche after Emerson.

Like Emerson in “Experience,” Nietzsche is forced to explore pessimism before he can begin the act of creation leading to affirmation. This pessimism is the result of skepticism, which puts into question objective truth. If there is no objective truth, then there can be no ultimate meaning and life is thus meaningless.

Objective truth is outside of the subject, and, therefore, this view of meaningfulness assumes that meaning must be given through some external force or higher power, such as God or any other deity. Without a deity, the idea that life has inherent value beyond the subject dissolves. Since meaning does not exist outside of the subject in an objective sense, it is up to the subject to assert his/her own power to create meaning through language. Power, for Emerson and Nietzsche, comes from the subject’s ability to create meaning from nothing, or to create it from pre-existing modes of thought.

The lack of objective meaning must be reconciled through the subject’s interpretation of his/her own existence. We must create our own purpose. Thinking through a lack of objective meaning to subjective meaning requires, as Cavell argues in his essay “The Future of Possibility,” thinking through pessimism to affirmation (22). In short, since there is no outside meaning, there can only be meaning coming from within, which is just as valid as meaning coming from without. This is empowering. It means we, as individuals, are in essence like gods – we erect systems and imprint our will on the world in a perpetual and eternal process of meaning-making.

## **I. Where Do We Find Ourselves? The Gap Between Experience and Reality**

At the beginning of “Experience,” the reader encounters an Emerson at once unfamiliar and absorbed by melancholy. As I have noted already, he begins his essay with a definitive question: “Where do we find ourselves?” (198). He answers with us finding ourselves surrounded by uncertainty. This is essentially a pessimistic Emerson, one whose worldview has been shattered by the death of his son. He responds: “We wake and find ourselves on a stair: there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight” (198).

This evokes the Derridean “aporia,” which is “not so much the space outside a particular perspective (how would one know it is there?) but is instead the inside mark of the boundary of that perspective’s limit—an indication of an outside space” (White 292). By evoking the aporia, White establishes that there is knowledge

beyond our own, but I think he misses the point of Emerson's beginning the essay with uncertainty.

By beginning with uncertainty, Emerson is foreshadowing the only certainty he can be sure of: his own subjective experience of the world. Even if he doesn't exist in the sense put forth by Descartes' *cogito* (i.e., a rational thinking self), he can still be certain of his experience of subjectivity, because even if the self does not exist in reality, it exists through Emerson's own unique experience of it. This is undoubtedly the project of his self-reliance. Emerson's staircase metaphor is evocative of the *aporia*, perhaps, but he more consciously aligns the staircase with his own philosophy's recognition of the transience of human experience. One moment we are on one step, the next we have moved upward and onto another step, and thus the process continues as such. In "Alone in America," Cary Wolfe writes,

*The project of Emersonian self-reliance . . . is thus driven by, and follows through on, the challenge of skepticism: just as the inability to apprehend the world is the very rationale of philosophy, so the very transience of the self, the provisionality of any proof of selfhood, is the rationale for its "onwardness," its continued "enacting" of its existence. (141)*

In short, self-reliance entails the recognition of an *aporia*, and then an acceptance of its existence, so that one can move on and continue living. It's no wonder Emerson, near the end of the essay proclaims, "Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!" (213). Our perspectives may very well be an illusion, as skepticism stresses, but what does that matter? We still have to live out the illusion.

Emerson recognizes his world view has been shattered, yet the world remains sturdy in the face of his wavering subjectivity. The Emerson of "Experience" is not the same Emerson of "Compensation," the one who has faith in the universe's ability to balance everything with a purpose. This is a much darker Emerson, one who has experienced the death of a son, and one who has learned nothing from it.

In the beginning of "Experience" we don't, as Cameron

and White so adamantly believe, encounter an Emerson who is trying to avoid the subject of his son's death, rather we encounter an Emerson who is devastated by his son's death. Here Emerson's grief is the catalyst that starts the essay in the sense that it starts with a shattered worldview where all is threatened to be meaningless so he can resurrect himself and build his worldview back up through the hermeneutical process of the subject reconstructing his world. In other words, "Experience" begins with our inability to know, firmly accepts our inability to know, and replaces it with our innate ability to interpret and thus create. In essence, he recognizes what Nietzsche does in the beginning of "On Truth," which is the world as perceived by humans is always in the process of being interpreted and recreated.

## II. Language and the Hermeneutical Process

For Nietzsche, interpretation is a part of the will to create, and "language is an expression of individual freedom experienced as the revaluation of all values" (Makarushka 49). As it is with Emerson, so it is with Nietzsche: "language is not an event but an eternally unfolding interpretative process engaged in the creation and reconfiguration of meaning informed by the metaphoricity of language and its 'as if'" (Makarushka 49). The revaluation of all values was the ultimate goal of Nietzsche's whole philosophy. In essence, the task was to take old definitions and moral concepts and to reveal them to be nothing more than constructs created by men from past ages. As such, these created concepts were not fixed and were open to analysis and interpretation. The old was open to reinterpretation. Emerson and Nietzsche realized meaning is not a given: it is created.

In typical Emersonian and Nietzschean fashion, this process of meaning-making is not as simple as seeing an event and interpreting it in a specific way. Meaning-making must be grounded, and to be so one must be familiar with the modes of prior thought throughout history. Emerson, in texts such as "The American Scholar" and "The Divinity School Address," pushes aside the past to create something new, but Nietzsche goes a step further in being more forward and harsh in his dealings with prior thought.

Nietzsche's revaluation of all values is possible because of his ability to destroy, or rather deconstruct, the ideas and so-called facts of the past through language. As Cavell writes, "If we are to think anew it must be from a new stance, one essentially unfamiliar to us...or from a further perspective that is uncontrollable by us" ("Possibility" 22). To think anew is to encounter the unknown, which is to meet uncertainty, and thus entails being able to sense possibility. By thinking from a new stance, we engage in creation, and thus the idea of possibility itself becomes possible through the very act of creating something new. As Emerson and Nietzsche would have it, this is what is meant by thinking for the future ("Possibility" 23).

In "Experience," Emerson nods to past thinkers who loved the real, but we get the sense Emerson disdains this notion of the real. The real leads to stasis, not creation. As he puts it,

*Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation, and sanity of mind in variety or facility of association. We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is quickly odious. We house with the insane, and must humor them; then conversation dies out. (202)*

Permanence is, by definition, immovable and fixed, which goes against our human experience of the world. Our perspectives are always moving, transforming, and being created. It's no accident that Emerson mentions the body in this section. For we are bodies, and as bodies we bridge the gap in a concrete way between language and world as appearance. The relationship we have as bodies encountering the world is circular, like the blood flowing through our veins, and we find sanity in the recognition of life as perpetual process. As he puts it, "We need change of objects." Without change, life becomes static and in a sense unbearable, since stasis is not conducive to the creative power that moves all of human life to discovery and self-realization.

Language for Emerson, in the first half of "Experience," is, as I have said, viewed with despair. Emerson "condenses his long-standing suspicion about the inadequacy of language faithfully to convey thoughts and impressions" (Smith 85). This is why he describes existence as a state of sleep or drunkenness in the beginning. However, the subject must regain composure, and the

only way to do this is through language. Language in short, though inadequate, is all we have, and since this is the case we need to use it to assert our own autonomy. As Makarushka writes,

*In the transparency of language and the symbolic character of action Emerson saw the possibility of the creation of meaning. His deeply felt concern about meaning, values, and the future is animated by a belief in the possibility that language can heal the fissures wrought by the losses he experiences. (53)*

In light of language's therapeutic value, "Experience" can then be read as doing what it set out to do, which was to heal Emerson from the loss he suffered when Waldo died. The essay is divided into two parts: (1) despair and (2) hope. In the first part language is viewed skeptically, but in the second part it is viewed optimistically. This is because the latter half of the essay has accepted the "metaphoricity" of language, lining it up with the metaphorical identity between nature and mind, which "suggests through their collaboration language becomes the condition for meaning" (70). Mind is determined by language, and, therefore, the type of language one thinks and uses becomes paramount to how one engages with the world. Emerson says as much when he writes,

*I distrust the facts and the inferences. Temperament is the veto or limitation-power in the constitution, very justly applied to restrain an opposite excess in the constitution, but absurdly offered as a bar to original equity. When virtue is in presence, all subordinate powers sleep. On its own level, or in view of nature, temperament is final. (202)*

For Emerson, one's temperament is defined by the language one uses, and when positive and affirmative language is used then a positive temperament will follow. Without language, the concept of virtue would be impossible, but with it, Emerson is able to give the concept a presence. By giving virtue a high value, Emerson is able to assert how it is above all of the other powers within the individual. His assertion is that outside facts and inferences are not grounded anywhere, and, therefore, the only place they exist is within the individual, whose temperament defines the value of those very facts and inferences. The individual thus validates what is important through his/her temperament. Through temperament and validation

subjective truth is created.

Nietzsche's view of language mirrors Emerson's in that he acknowledges the metaphorical nature of language and ascertains that knowledge of the Truth and the thing-in-itself is impossible. There is no point in even trying to comprehend it. It is beyond language, and thus there is never any gap between language and the world-in-itself since the latter exists beyond all knowledge and understanding. Therefore, like Emerson we must work with the only vehicle we do have: language.

*What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (117)*

Nietzsche's view that Truth is an illusion, a truth that humanity has forgotten is an illusion, seems to mean that since we can know nothing, then what's the point? Why try to understand the mind-independent-world if it is unknowable, always eluding our grasp? These questions miss the mark. For, by acknowledging the world as we know it to be a product of humanity and its many languages, we are able to see that the world only takes on meaning when we are a part of it. Without us, without our languages, it would mean nothing, and therefore, it could not be claimed to have any value whatsoever. We make things important, we inscribe them with value, and by recognizing we have created meaning we can recognize that we are empowered to speak in our own language, not the language of our peers or the language of our past.

### III. Affirmation and the Knowledge of Self-Creation

To speak our own language, we must know the languages that are different than our own, but we do not need to speak or create in these pre-established modes. As Emerson writes, "People forget that it is the eye which makes the horizon, and the rounding mind's eye which makes this or that man a type or representative of humanity

with the name of hero or saint" (209). With this proclamation, it becomes clear that without man nothing would really matter, for whom would it matter?

Humanity is the catalyst that puts the creative will into motion and paints the world in its own image. Is this solipsistic? Most certainly, but that is not necessarily negative. The reason for this is it can never be truly solipsistic since by creating the world and giving meaning we are not only saying we are the center of the universe and thus the only part that matters. No, by painting the universe with our languages we make the objects we create meaningful, thus defining ourselves and objects through the relational metaphors of language. Emerson puts it better,

*Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object falls successively into the subject itself. The subject exists, the subject enlarges; all things sooner or later fall into place. As I am, so I see; use what language we will, we can never know anything but what we are. (210-211)*

Emerson and Nietzsche were two thinkers, and poets in their own right, who took to task the radical destruction of the philosophical tradition they took up by refusing metaphysics and affirming a philosophy of the future, which is to say a philosophy that reconciled thinking with experience through practice, pitting the subject in the middle into the task of thinking as a means of self-creation. As Nietzsche writes, "I speak only of what I have lived through, not merely of what I have thought through: the opposition of thinking and life is lacking in my case. My 'theory' grows from my 'practice'" (qtd. in Lambert 233). This mirrors the task of Emerson's "Experience." He is forced to live his way through his philosophy by encountering and experiencing the loss of his son and placing himself as the subject at the center in order to work through the act of self-transformation. This is the act of turning subjectivity into practical power. It is taking one's own theory of experience and putting into to practice, thus allowing action to perpetually occur as the individual moves ever forward. In short, what Emerson and Nietzsche reveal is this: we are the lords of life.

### Annotated Bibliography



Cameron, Sharon. "Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience."" *Representations* 15.1 (1986): 15-41. Web.

Cameron argues the death of Emerson's son, Waldo, is not simply mentioned in the beginning and then discarded throughout the rest of the essay. She argues the son is everywhere throughout the essay, his presence being implied through his absence. I've used this essay to argue how "Experience" begins from Emerson experiencing the death of his son, and that this death is the catalyst that spurs the rest of the essay. In short, I have used this essay to show how from destruction creation is possible. For Emerson eventually rebuilds his world and lays claim to self-affirmation as the means of combating absence. In short, he fills the void left behind by his son with his own presence.

Cavell, Stanley. "The Future of Possibility." *Philosophical Romanticism*. Ed. Nikolas Kompridis. Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2006. 21-31. Print.

Cavell's essay asks the question: does philosophy have a future? And does this possibility of a future imply an end of philosophy within itself or whether an event outside of philosophy will be its end? This essay offers a sort of history of philosophy's own preoccupation with its role in constructing the future. Cavell begins by writing about how the past is worn out for such thinkers as Emerson, Thoreau, and Wittgenstein. The part of the essay that is most important for my argument is when Cavell engages with Emerson's "Experience" and argues that in this essay America found its philosophical voice in thinking, and the need to think, about the future. Cavell argues Emerson's essay integrates the old with the new to create a tone of optimism and encouragement. I have used this essay to show how Emerson's optimism creates a language of possibility for his philosophical undertaking.

Cavell, Stanley. *This New Yet Unapproachable America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Print.

This book contains two lectures: "Declining Decline" and "Finding as Founding." I have primarily used the former in my essay. In these

lectures, Cavell uses Emerson and Wittgenstein, showing how both philosophers examined and analyzed how language modifies human existence. Cavell argues that both Wittgenstein and Emerson were philosophers of culture, and he uses both thinkers to highlight and complement each other's philosophical inquiries. I have mainly used Cavell's book to support my claim that humanity uses language to create the appearance of unity through the recognition that unity is impossible outside of language, and thus, to replace this unity philosophical systems must be established.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, Joel Porte, and Sandra Morris. "Experience." *Emerson's Prose and Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. 198-213. Print.

Friedl, Herwig. "Fate, Power, and History in Emerson and Nietzsche." *ESQ* 43 (n.d.): 267-93. Web.

Friedl grounds his argument by looking at Emerson's definition of subjectivity as being a Being who experiences "the circular power of returning to itself." He aligns this definition of subjectivity with Nietzsche's "will to power" to assert how individuals, in the face of relativism, must overcome themselves and assert their own subjective stance in the world. He lends to the idea of the individual being his or her own "fate." I never quote this essay in my argument, yet it was important in helping me see the link between Emerson and Nietzsche because Friedl examines philosophical concepts such as Dasein, or the human beingness of Being as Heidegger defines it, with the two thinkers' notions of subjectivity and the creative will to power by exploring how the subject is constructed when encountering such ideas as fate, power, and history.

Lambert, Gregg. "Emerson, or Man Thinking." *The Other Emerson*. Ed. Branka Arsic and Cary Wolfe. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. 229-50. Print.

Lambert's essay analyzes Emerson and Nietzsche's use of silence as it relates to the process of man thinking. The essay argues that for meaningful engagement with the world and language to be possible,

both thinkers recognized the need to remain silent when words would not suffice or would degrade what is being spoken of through the act of defining the indefinable. The essay is useful because it examines how the mind and nature are linked through instinct, and it helped me ground my argument when I examined how language is of the mind and the mind is of nature, making the three intrinsically linked in Emerson, and thus meaningful.

Makarushka, Irena S. M. *Religious Imagination and Language in Emerson and Nietzsche*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994. Print.

This short book examines how the religious imagination and language in the writings and thought of Nietzsche and Emerson are “both the condition and the expression of individual freedom.” Makarushka defines freedom as a creative engagement with language as it is used to interpret and reinterpret the world. She argues that Emerson and Nietzsche used language to reexamine and describe religion and religious experience to empower the individual. For Makarushka, religious imagination is the precursor to the dominant modes of organized religion, and she argues that the imagination allows each thinker to do what religious sentiment was originally meant to do: reinterpret the world in a meaningful and perpetually shifting encounter that is never fixed but always in the process of being created. This whole book has been central to many of my arguments concerning language’s ability to construct meaning through the hermeneutical process.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.” *The Nietzsche Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. 114-24. Print.

Smith, Gayle L. “Style and Vision in Emerson’s ‘Experience.’” *ESQ* 27.2 (1981): 85-95. Web.

Smith’s essay looks at the problem of reconciling language and reality. It examines how Emerson’s “Experience” is preoccupied with this problem. This essay helps support my argument that subjectivity ultimately acts as the sort of umbrella that encompasses the polarities

inherent in binary opposites. Subjectivity contains both ends of the spectrum as well as occupying the degrees of difference in between each set of binaries. The essay explores how Emerson’s own style and vision grounds his own subjectivity within the world. In this essay, Gayle shows how Emerson’s use of the dash, commas, and other punctuation allows him to write an essay in his own voice. Gayle helps me show how style is an aspect of subjectivity.

White, Ryan. “Neither Here nor There: On Grief and Absence in Emerson’s ‘Experience.’” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 23.4 (2010): 285-306. Web.

Ryan’s essay has helped to support my idea that Emerson combats the relativism inherent in coming to terms with each individual’s subjectivity through the justification of world building. By building our own worlds we admit that others are doing the same. The essay’s definition of the Derridean “aporia” has been helpful because it highlights Emerson’s recognition of the limits of knowledge, which results from the limits of language. The “aporia” evokes the idea of uncertainty, and White, like Cameron argues uncertainty results from the death Emerson’s son. I argue the lack of footing in the beginning of Emerson’s essay is the result of the Waldo’s death, but that White misses the point of the essay because he really only focuses on the first half of the essay, and neglects the affirmative influence of the latter half of “Experience.”

Wolfe, Cary. “Alone with America: Cavell, Emerson, and the Politics of Individualism.” *New Literary History* 25.1 (1994): 137-57. Web.

I used this essay to help explore Emerson’s notion of self-reliance as it is exhibited in “The Poet” and “Experience.” Wolfe works with Stanley Cavell’s analysis of Emerson’s response to Kant’s assertion that we can never know the thing-in-itself. Kant’s notion leads to skepticism, or a questioning of our ability to know the world. Emerson’s response is self-reliance as a state of perpetual becoming where knowing the world is not as important as mastery over oneself. Philosophy states we cannot know the world, but the transience of being allows us to continue onward despite this fact, erecting our

own subjectivity to come to terms with the world.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, and G.E.M. Anscombe. *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984. Print.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Timothy Urban is currently enrolled in the MA in English program at Bridgewater State University. His research project was completed in the spring of 2015 under the mentorship of Professor Ann Brunjes. He plans on pursuing a Ph.D. once he completes his coursework in the MA program at Bridgewater State University.

